

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project 2008 Interagency Field Team Annual Work Plan

Final: July 1, 2008

The Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project is a cooperative effort among six Lead Agencies: Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT), U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The Lead Agency Directors provide guidance and direction to the Project through an Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC), comprised of one representative from each Lead Agency. In turn, AMOC guides and directs an Interagency Field Team (IFT) that carries out authorized wolf management activities on the ground.

IFT Annual Work Plans describe the administrative, management, and other activities that have been authorized for a given year. The activities will occur primarily in or near the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA), in Arizona and New Mexico, and on the WMAT's Fort Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona.¹ Each plan synthesizes information from all six of the Project's six Lead Agencies. A Project-wide IFT work plan helps coordinate work by the cooperating agencies, and leads to a single Project-wide annual report on results.

IFT Annual Work Plans are shaped through discussion with, and approved by, AMOC. The activities and priorities identified in each plan may be modified, postponed, or canceled, and other activities may be added during the year, due to changing circumstances, such as critical incidents (e.g. wolf depredations on livestock or other wolf/human conflicts), turnover in Project personnel, budget shortfalls, and other emergent situations. However, such changes are expected to be the exception rather than the rule; with proper planning, adaptive management, and cooperation, IFT activities should generally occur as outlined in the Annual Work Plan.

At year's end, the IFT conducts an evaluation to (a) analyze results for the year, including progress toward Project management objectives, (b) determine causes of any significant deviations that occurred during the year, and (c) summarize personnel resources that were allocated to each activity during the year. The IFT and AMOC will use the evaluation to develop an Annual Report for the current year and an Annual Work Plan for the next year.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions listed below apply to all aspects of the Reintroduction Project, including the activities described and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) referenced in this plan. The

¹ The San Carlos Indian Reservation (SCAR) lies adjacent to the BRWRA and FAIR in Arizona. A San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT) Tribal Council Resolution opposes Mexican wolf presence on SCAR and requires removal of any wolves occurring there. Accordingly, SCAT has declined to become a cooperator in the Reintroduction Project and only allows USFWS and USDA-WS employees to assist the Tribe in wolf management activities on SCAR. Some of the USFWS and USDA-WS employees are members of the IFT, but their activities on SCAR are not integrated into this work plan because it only covers the BRWRA and FAIR.

current Project SOPs, and previous IFT work plans and annual reports, can be accessed at the Project's Web site, <http://azgfd/wolf>.

Breeding pair: an adult male and an adult female that have produced at least two pups during the previous breeding season that survived until December 31 of the year of their birth (USFWS 1998).

Wolf pack: \geq two wolves that maintain an established territory. In the event that one of the two alpha (dominant) wolves dies, the remaining alpha wolf, regardless of pack size, retains the pack status or name.

Releases: wolves that are released directly from captivity, with no previous free-ranging experience. These "initial releases" may only occur in the Primary Recovery Zone, which is entirely within Greenlee County, Arizona (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

Translocations: free-ranging wolves that are captured and moved to a location away from their site of capture; this includes captured free-ranging wolves that have been temporarily placed in captivity. Unlike initial releases, translocations can occur in the Primary Recovery Zone or in the Secondary Recovery Zone (Fig. 1). The Secondary Recovery Zone contains portions of Apache and Greenlee counties in Arizona, and Catron, Sierra, and Grant counties in New Mexico (Fig. 2).

Depredation: confirmed killing or wounding of lawfully-present domestic livestock by one or more wolves.

Depredation incident: refers to the aggregate number of livestock killed or mortally wounded by an individual wolf or by a single pack of wolves at a single location within a one-day (24 hr) period, beginning with the first confirmed kill, as documented in an initial IFT incident investigation pursuant to SOP 11.0.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR CURRENT YEAR

The Project management objectives for 2008 are a 10 percent increase in the minimum wolf population count (i.e. 2007 end-of-year minimum population was 52 wolves) and/or the addition of at least one breeding pair (i.e. 2007 minimum number of breeding pairs was 4), while minimizing negative impacts of wolves.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

1. General Wolf Monitoring

To monitor the BRWRA wolf population, the IFT will implement Mexican Wolf Aerial Telemetry SOP 18.0 and Ground Telemetry SOP 17.0. The objective is to acquire at least two locations per week on all wolves, via aerial and/or ground telemetry. To achieve the desired results, aerial (fixed wing) monitoring will occur at least weekly and ground monitoring will occur as often as necessary. However, aerial and ground monitoring will both depend on access

into specific areas, which may be limited by weather conditions, forest fires, and other factors beyond IFT control.

Monitoring emphasis will shift seasonally. Winter monitoring efforts will document pack sizes, pup survival, pair bonding, breeding, and dispersal via snow tracking, howling surveys, and telemetry. Spring efforts will document denning and pup production. Summer efforts will document rendezvous sites and pup presence/absence via howling surveys, visual observations, and tracking. Fall efforts will document dispersal, survival, and movements during big game hunting seasons. Only flight locations will be used for home range analysis, since they are not as biased by wolf occurrence along roads as locations obtained from the ground would be. Flight scheduling may be intensified during certain times of the year to locate dens, determine when pups are born, and to conduct searches for missing wolves.

The IFT will coordinate wolf monitoring activity and location information with Federal and State Law Enforcement (LE) personnel; when they are available, USFWS and AGFD LE agents will assist the IFT with wolf monitoring.

2. Fall Monitoring

During the fall big game hunting seasons, two IFT members will be assigned to make hunter and camper contacts and locate wolves on a daily basis. These Project personnel will be stationed in areas in which wolves might be vulnerable to being shot (e.g. when they are feeding on deer or elk carcasses near roads, or are localized in areas of high hunter density), so they can make additional recreationist contacts and intensively monitor the wolves. To reduce such vulnerability, in Arizona native ungulate carcasses that are visible from roads will be moved into forested areas after being investigated by an AGFD Wildlife Manager, especially when wolves are located in the immediate area. Note: see the preceding item regarding LE coordination.

3. Wolf Releases, Translocations and Removals

The IFT will handle possible, recommended, and approved wolf releases, translocations, and removals in accordance with SOPs 5.0, 6.0, and 13.0 (and the pertinent Clarification Memos), including discussion or coordination with AMOC, the USFS, affected stakeholders, and the public. All initial release proposals will be reviewed by AMOC and subject to Lead Agency Director approval. Translocations and removals may occur throughout the year, but most are subject to prior review by AMOC and approval by the Directors. Translocations or removals generally result from management issues, such as depredations, nuisance behavior, and wolves establishing home ranges outside the BRWRA or FAIR. In addition, wolves that localize on the SCAR will be removed and translocated by USFWS and USDA-WS personnel. Releases, translocations and removals are extremely variable in complexity, logistics, and difficulty, making it impossible to predict the staff time each will require.

4. Radio Collar Free-Ranging Wolves

The Project objective is to maintain a minimum of one collared wolf per pack, with emphasis on collaring the alpha pair in each pack. Trapping will be conducted in accordance with SOP 14.0 and SOP 21.0. Trapping will begin as early as late April, depending on environmental conditions, and will cease in the fall when nightly low temperatures reach freezing. AGFD, NMDGF, and WMAT personnel are each responsible for conducting radio-collar trapping

operations on their respective jurisdictional lands. However, they may request assistance from USFWS and any other cooperating agencies as necessary. Project-wide, trapping efforts during summer will focus on capturing uncollared wolves (especially in newly formed packs) and replacing old collars in known packs. Fall trapping will focus on capturing pups, with an emphasis on uncollared packs and packs that were not trapped during the summer.

5. Year-End Minimum Population Count and Capture Operation

During January, the IFT will conduct a year-end helicopter operation, with fixed-wing and ground assistance as necessary, to help count the wolves that were alive on December 31 and to opportunistically capture and collar wolves that are observed in open habitat.

6. Respond to Depredation Reports

The IFT, primarily USDA-WS agents, will respond to depredation reports to investigate the cause of death within 24 hours of receiving the report (see SOP 11.0 and its Clarification Memo). Per SOP 11.0, other IFT members may assist by preserving evidence and monitoring wolves in the area via radio-telemetry, and, in accordance with SOP 13.0 and its Clarification Memo, through subsequent trapping efforts to harass or remove wolves. These management actions are logistically complex, and trapping time can vary greatly from one location and/or wolf to another. Thus, estimating the time the IFT will spend on depredation report response is difficult at best. Therefore, USDA-WS has stationed a full-time depredation specialist in the Project area and has appointed other agents to assist the Project as necessary, to ensure timely compliance with SOPs 11.0 and 13.0 and their respective Clarification Memos.

7. Respond to Wolf Sightings

In accordance with SOP 10.0, the IFT will document, evaluate, and (as appropriate) investigate all reports of wolves through phone interviews and/or field visits. The IFT will promptly investigate credible reports to acquire additional information about each sighting. However, in general, the IFT will look for multiple sightings of wolves within a localized area before investigating on the ground. This is a more efficient use of staff resources than investigating an isolated sighting, and is more likely to provide an opportunity to trap uncollared wolves and document formation of new packs and dispersal activity.

8. Response and Removal of Nuisance Wolves

The IFT will respond to nuisance wolf reports in accordance with SOP 13.0 and its Clarification Memo, by investigating the situation and, as appropriate, preserving evidence and monitoring wolves in the area via radio-telemetry, hazing, deploying Radio Activated Guard (RAG) boxes, setting up remote cameras, and/or trapping. Removals will generally result from management issues such as depredations, persistent nuisance behavior, or travel outside the BRWRA and FAIR. Nuisance removals are extremely variable in terms of occurrence and approach, making it impossible to predict the amount of personnel required to accomplish these management actions over a year's time.

9. Administration

Managing and coordinating field operations for the Project requires that a broad array of daily and other administrative duties be performed throughout the year, including: staffing the Alpine office during normal work hours; coordinating work schedules (including office coverage, field

work, training, outreach, and personal leave); developing initial release and translocation recommendations; scheduling monitoring and other flights; maintaining Project databases; managing budgets; maintaining and ordering equipment and supplies; communicating with AMOC; writing agency briefings and monthly Project updates; developing an Annual Work Plan; and other administrative tasks. The amount of personnel and time required to accomplish these duties tends to be highly variable over the course of a year.

10. Attend Meetings Requiring IFT Representation

Throughout the year, IFT representation is needed or required at various meetings, including: local public meetings on Project-related activities such as proposed initial releases and translocations; quarterly AMOC and Adaptive Management Work Group meetings; coordination meetings with local USFS staff; individual and other permittee meetings; and local government meetings. IFT personnel that attend these meetings will provide up-to-date information about current Project issues, Project-related agenda items, and the current status of Project field operations. These meetings provide significant opportunities for IFT personnel to interact with the public, agency cooperators, and other agencies.

11. Write Annual Report

Each year, the IFT will write an Annual Report on the preceding calendar year to communicate the most recent Project results to cooperating agencies and the public. The report provides an overview of current status for individual wolves and the population as a whole, results from management and outreach activities (including the most recent end-of-year count), the captive breeding program, and adaptive management within the Project. The final draft Annual Report for the preceding year is due to AMOC on or before March 15 of the current year.

12. Continue Development of SOPs

Members of the IFT will regularly review and evaluate existing SOPs and, as necessary, draft new SOPs or recommend changes to existing SOPs for consideration and approval by AMOC. Note: changes or clarifications in SOP 13.0 must be approved by the Lead Agency Directors.

13. Evaluate Release Sites

In 2008, in cooperation with USFS and appropriate staff from other Lead Agencies, the IFT will identify and analyze previously-approved and potential new sites that might be needed for wolf releases in 2008 and 2009. The IFT's overall site location map for this task will include appropriate buffer areas around the BRWRA, FAIR, SCAR boundaries, and around occupied dwellings and towns. The IFT evaluation (recommendation) will be developed in accordance with SOPs 5.0 and 6.0 (and the applicable Clarification Memos), and vetted with AMOC and the Lead Agency Directors in July. The USFS will evaluate any newly proposed release sites through Biological Analysis and Evaluation, and (if required) consultation with USFWS Ecological Services. Final decisions on site approval for any initial releases and translocations will be made by the Lead Agency Directors and communicated to the public through AMOC.

14. Staff training and Development

IFT personnel will participate in professional training and developmental as appropriate to their agency requirements and opportunities. This could include formal training, attendance at professional meetings, self-directed projects, involvement in professional or local organizations,

or other self- or agency-selected activities. Assisting with captive management facilities during captures and annual check-ups will again be used to provide IFT staff with opportunities to become more proficient with capturing, handling, and processing techniques

15. Conduct Outreach

The Reintroduction Project's outreach program is a year-round effort to provide accurate, unbiased information about the Project to the interested and affected public and to cooperating agencies. The IFT emphasizes providing outreach to local affected communities, with at least 75 percent of outreach presentations occurring within 50 miles of the BRWRA and on the FAIR. Public information officers from the cooperating agencies will work with the IFT to maximize outreach effectiveness and coverage. In accordance with SOP 3.0, IFT members and cooperators will implement a variety of outreach activities (see also Table 1):

A. Monthly Updates

The IFT will develop a monthly narrative summary of Project activities to distribute to cooperators and the public in accordance with SOP 3.0. The updates will include information on recent wolf activities (including general wolf locations), interagency and public communication and coordination, changes in IFT staff, law enforcement news, outreach activities, and other Project-related information. The IFT will draft each update and forward it to the Lead Agencies for review. When the update has been approved, the IFT will coordinate with AGFD Region 1 (Pinetop) to distribute it electronically through an AGFD Listserve for people who have signed up at <http://aazgfd.gov/signup> to receive *Endangered Species Updates*. The IFT will also send the monthly updates via email or fax to specified local entities (e.g. permittees), and post them on the AGFD and USFWS Mexican wolf Web sites and at other locations in or near the BRWRA and the FAIR.

B. Commission and Tribal Council Briefings

On a quarterly basis, the AGFD IFT Leader will produce an AGF Commission briefing that summarizes significant highlights for the reporting period. On an annual basis, the NMDGF IFT Leader will produce a NM Game Commission briefing containing significant highlights for the reporting period. The WMAT IFT Leader will produce WMAT Tribal Council briefings as requested by the Council.

C. Communication on Crucial Issues

The IFT will use all available methods to ensure that crucial (e.g. time-sensitive) information is communicated to the appropriate entities in timely fashion. Specific targeted individuals (e.g. a permittee close to a translocation site) will be reached on SOP-related issues and other urgent matters through personal visit, telephone calls, and/or email, as necessary and appropriate. Recreationists and other National Forest and FAIR visitors will be given pertinent information as they are contacted in the field. For example, campers might be informed of wolves in the area of their campsite. In addition, the IFT will post a weekly journal, containing two bearings and no mileage for wolf locations, on the AGFD Project Web site (<http://azgfd.gov/wolf>).

| Table 1. Interagency Field Team outreach activities planned for the current year. | |
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| Outreach Activity | 2008 Goal |
| A. Monthly updates | Produce 12 monthly updates, each of which is completed by the end of the first week of the following month and distributed to the public via the AGFD Listserve and the AGFD Project Web site. |
| B. Commission and Tribal Council Briefings | Produce Project updates for the AGFD and NMDGF Commissions and WMAT Tribal Council as requested. |
| C. Communication on crucial issues | Use Project Web sites, telephones, email, and personal contacts to ensure timely communication with affected parties on crucial issues; make 52 weekly postings of wolf locations on the AGFD Project Web site; in accordance with SOPs 5.0, 6.0, and 13.0 (and their Clarification Memos), contact affected agencies and local livestock permittees about releases, translocations, and removals. |
| D. Presentations | AGFD will provide at least 20 and NMDGF will provide 5-10 Project presentations to stakeholders and interested people. At least 10 Project presentations will be made to USFS Ranger Districts and at least seven will be offered to County Commissions in AZ or NM. |
| E. Conferences | At least five Project presentations will be made at professional conferences and/or workshops. |
| F. Revision of 10(j) rule | Assist AMOC as needed in developing NEPA Scoping and a Draft EIS for a possible 10(j) rule change. |
| G. Internet Web sites | Help maintain the AGFD Project Web site with weekly posting or updating of Project-related information and continue developing education curriculum pages. Assist with upkeep of the USFWS Mexican wolf Web site. |
| H. Annual Reports | Complete the AMOC-review draft of the Annual Report by March 15. |
| I. Adaptive Management Work Group Meetings | Conduct at least 4 AMWG meetings in communities in or adjacent to the BRWRA (including FAIR and SCAR). |
| J. Field Contacts | Make at least 450 National Forest visitor contacts in the field to provide Project information. |
| K. Published Information | Provide wolf reintroduction information and identification tips in AGFD, NMDGF, and WMAT hunt regulations, local newspapers and magazines, and other publications. |
| L. Media Coordination | Ensure Lead Agency consistency, accuracy, and timely coordination in providing news releases and other public information, in accordance with SOP 3.0. |
| M. Closure notices | Provide sufficient signage and information for all closures on site and at nearby places to enhance public awareness. |

D. Presentations

Lecture-type presentations, booth-type informational tables, posters, displays, and public meetings (including “Q&A” sessions) will be used to provide accurate, objective information about the Project. When appropriate, diverse viewpoints of stakeholders will be presented to offer balanced perspectives. Typically, outreach presentations will be provided to school groups, civic organizations, resorts, campgrounds, and workshops, with emphasis on presentations in or near the BRWRA and FAIR.

Education programs that are conducted within the BRWRA or FAIR by cooperating agencies or outside entities may be used by the IFT (workloads permitting) to provide Project-related information, including demonstrating: capabilities and limitations of current monitoring techniques, such as radio-tracking; and recognition and evaluation of wolf sign, such as scat and abandoned kill-site remains. Habitat relationships and current uses of public lands can also be discussed during such “hands-on” types of activities. IFT participation in such activities will focus on engaging the public from communities within the BRWRA and FAIR.

E. Conferences

Lectures or other presentations may be made at professional conferences and workshops, such as annual meetings of The Wildlife Society and the Species Survival Plan, etc.

F. Revision of the 10(j) Rule

As requested by AMOC, the IFT will assist with NEPA activities related to possible revision of the current 10(j) rule, including meeting coordination and information dissemination.

G. Internet Web Sites

AGFD and USFWS will continue to maintain Web sites with information about the Project. The AGFD Web site provides access at <http://azgfd.gov/wolf> to the Project’s monthly updates, annual work plans, annual reports, 5-Year Review, SOPS and Clarification memos, AMWG meeting summary notes, and information about Mexican wolves. The USFWS site, <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf>, provides access to documents pertaining to the Mexican wolf recovery program, such as the 1996 Environmental Impact Statement on reintroduction in Arizona and New Mexico, the 1998 Nonessential Experimental Population Rule, the Reintroduction Project’s monthly updates, and other information about Mexican wolves. Media advisories and other special news items are made available on the two agency Web sites. AGFD also maintains a self-subscription Listserve that enables interested parties to automatically receive monthly Project updates, AMWG meeting announcements, and other Project-related news (sign up at <http://azgfd.gov/signup>). As necessary, the IFT will coordinate with AGFD and USFWS Web managers and outreach personnel to update and upgrade the two Web sites, including enhancing education curriculum pages. The IFT will also continue to ask other agencies (e.g. local governments in or near BRWRA) and nongovernmental organizations to provide links on their Web sites to the AGFD and USFWS Mexican wolf Web sites.

H. Annual Reports

The IFT will produce a draft Annual Report of the previous year's activities and by March 15 submit it to AMOC for discussion and approval. This report will include a summary of wolf population dynamics, occupied range, prey use, outreach efforts, livestock depredation, wolf-human interactions, funding, and Project personnel, as well as other pertinent information.

I. Adaptive Management Work Group Meetings

The IFT will provide support as requested for AMWG meetings, which occur quarterly in or near the BRWRA and FAIR, to provide information on recent IFT activities and to assist AMOC with improving the content and implementation of this plan. AMWG meetings are used to:

- Help implement adaptive management of the Reintroduction Project;
- Evaluate and improve interagency cooperation in the field;
- Advise the Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator on issues related to wolf reintroduction; and
- Provide a forum in which to:
 - a) Evaluate the status and progress of the Reintroduction Project;
 - b) Coordinate law enforcement activities;
 - c) Consider citizen concerns regarding reintroduction; and
 - d) Exchange other pertinent information.

J. Field Contacts

Informal field contacts made by the IFT primarily occur in the spring and fall, with emphasis on big game hunting seasons to inform hunters of the possibility wolves in the area and to provide them with suggestions for avoiding conflict.

K. Published Information

The IFT will continue to provide updated information to be published in the AGFD, NMDGF, and WMAT hunt regulation booklets every year. The purpose of the information is to make hunters aware of wolf presence in the BRWRA, to aid in distinguishing between wolves and coyotes, and to help hunters avoid negative interactions with wolves in the field. In addition, as necessary, the IFT will provide information to local newspapers and through media releases, and will update existing brochures and develop new ones for dissemination to the public.

L. Media Coordination

Within the constraints of workloads and pertinent agency policies, the IFT will comply with reasonable requests from the media for readily-available Project information that is available to the public. However, media requests to accompany Project personnel in the field for videotaping or to conduct in-depth on-site interviews in conjunction with taping footage for a "mass-media" production will be handled in accordance with SOP 25.0. In addition, all media requests will be communicated to the USFWS Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's Media Coordinator, for coordination with the Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator (or designee) and Lead Agency media coordinators for the Project to ensure proper handling (see SOPs 3.0 and 25.0). In particular, media-related activities

must be coordinated around the field schedules of Project personnel, to ensure that essential management activities are given top priority and to ensure that conflicts with wolf management actions (e.g. releases, captures) are avoided. Media coordinators must consult with each other and with Project staff before committing the IFT to appointments.

Media coordinators will ensure that news releases are coordinated with appropriate cooperators and conducted jointly, when feasible and appropriate, as outlined in the Mexican Wolf Project Public Information Release Matrix (see attached).

M. Closure Notices

When warranted under the nonessential experimental rule, the local USFS Ranger District or the WMAT will implement area closures around release pens, dens or rendezvous sites, including posting and enforcing any special conditions that are approved for specific closures (e.g. entry into closed area allowed without dogs). The closure area will be posted appropriately with signs and, if feasible, informational flyers will be posted at nearby trailheads to provide advance warning to enable hikers and other recreationists to detour around closures. In addition, closure notices will be posted as follows: local USFS Ranger District office(s) and administrative site(s), on service kiosks near closures, and in Project monthly updates.

16. Less-than-lethal Projectiles Programs

When authorized by USFWS, AGFD, NMDGF, and WMAT will provide permittees with less-than-lethal projectiles to assist the Project in deterring wolf nuisance and depredation behavior by wolves that are near occupied dwellings or livestock. The jurisdictional agency will issue the rounds and provide training. USFWS will provide paintball guns when requested by permittees, but cooperating agencies will not provide firearms.

17. Coordination with USFS

The IFT will coordinate with the USFS Regional Office and the various District Rangers, Range Conservationists, and Wildlife staffs in the BRWRA on Project-related activities and issues, including developing and encouraging use of alternative solutions to depredation issues. Note: as noted previously, a USFS liaison is needed in the IFT to enhance coordination between the Project and local USFS staff on all aspects of day-to-day operations, including keeping District Rangers and permittees informed, adjusting annual operating instructions, and coordinating wolf releases and translocations. USFS expects to fill such a position in 2008.

18. Assist with Ongoing Research and Scat Collection in Arizona

An academic research project examining genetic mark-recapture population estimation methods on wolf scats within the BRWRA is ongoing. USFWS has allocated 1 volunteer for two 1-month collection periods to assist the study.